

Medicine and Public Health

Context/Preamble¹

In recent decades, we have created a world that is essentially new and different from what we inherited. The pace of profound changes that have occurred in just the past fifty years is rapidly accelerating. Depletion of natural resources, climate change, degraded soil and water quality, rapidly declining biodiversity, and widespread destruction of habitats are unequivocally linked to population growth and the ways that people live. Although the health and well-being of many people have dramatically improved as a result of technological achievements and social development, these benefits are not universally enjoyed. Unprecedented numbers of people are living in poverty, primarily in rapidly growing urban slums, while the gaps between the rich and poor grow dramatically larger.

The optimal, achievable health of individuals, families, and communities are bedrock in a society where productivity, participation, a sense of self-worth, and happiness are valued. This generational goal for health and associated four objectives focus on the essential issues that influence health status and that guide and harness the talents and ingenuity of healthcare practitioners, public health officials, policy makers, governments, communities and individual citizens. To some extent, these goals are aspirational but we are convinced that they are largely achievable. As we move to accomplish these goals, we will increasingly leave to our children a biologically, culturally diverse and equitable world in which all species can grow to their full potential and live out their natural lives.

Generational Goal. By the next generation, all individuals irrespective of race, gender, age, income level, medical status or place of birth will have available to them the conditions necessary to attain and maintain a high quality of health, with an emphasis on disease prevention. .

Objective 1. Environmental, social and economic conditions necessary for health and wellbeing are assured and equitably distributed, by addressing food and agriculture, the chemical, physical, and built environment, and socioeconomic determinants of health.

Priority Action Steps

1. Invest in systems of food production, distribution, and sales that foster access to affordable and healthy food choices and that also protect, maintain, and restore environmental resources.
2. Develop and implement social, environmental and economic policies to achieve a non-toxic environment.
3. Develop primary and secondary prevention programs that recognize the length and steepness of the socioeconomic gradient as major determinants of health status in individuals and populations:
 - For primary prevention: develop and implement policies that reduce health disparities related to the steepness and length of the socioeconomic gradient,

¹ Context/Preamble: Thanks to Ted Schettler for this opening, taken mostly from his "Toward Tomorrow Foundation Paper" March 2007.

including those that make it easier for people lower on the gradient to move higher. (examples: access to high quality education, starting in early childhood; increasing the number of households with adequate income through a variety of means, including tax policies; improving access to new opportunities for enhanced job skills.)

- For secondary prevention: develop and implement policies that diminish the health consequences associated with occupying a lower position on the socioeconomic gradient. (examples: universal access to health care; ensuring safe, affordable, and healthy housing and neighborhoods; limiting workplace exposures to physical and chemical hazards and workplace stress)
4. Ensure the resilience of natural systems on which human health depends by conserving biodiversity through preservation of unique habitats and paying attention to scale, contiguousness, and migratory patterns.
 5. Ensure clean air, clean abundant water, and fertile soil through innovative technologies that are informed by the intelligence and resilience of natural systems and incorporate cradle to cradle principles.
 6. Invest in global programs that promote family planning and economic and social conditions to support small families.
 7. Build systems for moving people and goods that are pollution free, powered by renewable energy, and health enhancing.

Objective 2. Public health, health care and health-related research emphasize disease-prevention and health promotion, and recognize the inextricable links among the health of individuals, communities, and ecological systems.

Priority Action Steps

1. Establish financing systems that ensure sufficient resources for disease-prevention programs and services.
2. Strengthen and create where needed national public programs and policies that promote equitable and easy access to health care for individuals, families and communities.
3. Ensure that training of medical and public health practitioners includes diverse disciplines relevant to human health, including for example, nutrition and related agricultural systems, ecology, and ethics. Health systems should explicitly integrate contributions from diverse disciplines relevant to individual, community, and ecosystem health.
4. Develop delivery and financing infrastructure so that health practitioners are able to guide patients towards primary and secondary prevention steps, in addition to medical treatment, that hold promise for improvement in health status.
5. Redefine health care to include restorative and integrative therapies.
6. Develop and implement disease prevention research agenda(s) that include the public in establishing priorities and the design of research and establishes mechanisms to preserve the integrity of the scientific process and the dissemination of results.
7. Ensure that people have access to open spaces, diverse, and beautiful ecosystems

Objective 3. U.S. society has sufficiently reduced its contributions to climate change and taken bold leadership in reversing current climate change trends through reform of systems for energy development and use, transportation, agricultural and industrial production, and the built environment.

Priority Action Steps

1. Through U.S. policies and actions, promote the global the use of renewable energy supplies that sustain rather than degrade health.
2. Resolve conflicts over changing natural resources without war and armed confrontation that further impact the environment, public health and human rights.
3. Enhance medical and public health programs to support the rapid delivery of effective health services in response to floods, food shortages, infectious disease outbreaks, energy shortages and other impacts of climate change.
4. Enhance crop diversity to facilitate resilience and adaptive response to environmental stressors.

Objective 4. Move Towards Ending The Unsustainable Global Scourge of Perpetual War and Violence by Dramatically Transforming Militarist-Driven Institutions and Economies to Serve Current and Emerging Environmental and Public Health Priorities.

To safeguard public and environmental health, we must develop and promote new global institutions and arrangements that foster non-violent solutions to conflicts among nations, within communities, within homes, and between races, ethnic groups, and genders. Such steps are absolutely imperative to counter the increasing human and environmental toll of modern warfare that hinders the necessary collective effort to deal with the unfolding environmental crisis that has no boundaries, and to redirect the massive resources currently squandered on preparing for, and waging war, to heal the planet.

Priority Action Steps

1. Drastically cut U.S. and global military budgets and redirect resources to environmental restoration and green economic conversion, including sites of contamination directly related to the legacy of the military-industrial complex.
2. Call on the U.S. and all other nuclear weapons states to immediately comply with their Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including an initial step by the U.S. government to halt proposed plans to build a new generation of nuclear weapons under the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program.
3. Create and implement a robust non-proliferation agenda. A concerted global phase-out of civilian nuclear power programs should be instituted in line with development of “carbon-free and nuclear-free” alternative energy sources to deal with climate change.
4. Call on the U.S. and all other nations to end all currently “ambiguous” biological and chemical weapons programs rationalized as “defensive” in nature and immediately negotiate robust inspection and verification regimes to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention and Chemical Weapons Convention by closing all loopholes.
5. Immediately bring an end to the global arms trade that fuels “small arms” conflicts throughout the underdeveloped world.
6. Transform/scale down military forces into viable, internationally-sanctioned and directed peacekeeping forces that rely on an absolutely minimal use of deadly force to deter greater intercommunal violence.

Generational Goal Statements: *Health*
January 13, 2009

7. In order to foster a culture of peace all global primary education programs will prioritize the development and inculcation of ongoing curriculum in conflict resolution.